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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 NICOSIA 000128

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SUBJECT: TURKISH CYPRIOTS GUARDEDLY OPTIMISTIC OVER
PAPADOPOULOS'S ELIMINATION

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- 1B. NICOSIA 67
- 1C. 07 NICOSIA 980

Classified By: Classified by Ambassador Ronald L. Schlicher, Reasons 1.
4 (a), (d)

1.(C) Summary: Solution-minded Turkish Cypriots (T/C) expressed guarded optimism after the first-round defeat of Republic of Cyprus President Tassos Papadopoulos on February 17. "President" Mehmet Ali Talat and "Prime Minister" Ferdi Sabit Soyer publicly expressed hope that a change in Greek Cypriot leadership would break the current CyProb negotiations logjam. Embassy contacts in the T/C community, even those ideologically aligned with AKEL challenger Dimitris Christofias, believe it easier to reach a deal with his opponent, the pro-business (and in 2004, pro-Annan Plan) Ioannis Kasoulides (DISY). All expect (and desire) some type of cross-community goodwill gesture from the G/C victor early in his tenure. Despite visceral good feelings over the despised Papadopoulos's loss, one Talat insider claimed the "President" remained troubled by growing T/C nationalism, a deteriorating economy, and impressions in Turkey that some sort of Kosovo-like scenario for northern Cyprus still was in play; all conceivably could limit Talat's ability to engage substantively the new G/C leader, we believe. Principal opposition party UBP dismissed the first-round RoC results as meaningless, certain only the messenger had changed, not the message. Ultimately, we argue, Turkish Cypriots are likely to judge the RoC President by his willingness to negotiate along the general lines of the Annan Plan -- albeit repackaged, renamed, and reintroduced -- and by his ability to respect T/Cs and positively re-engage Turkey. End Summary.

T/Cs Hope that the Deadlock can be overcome

2.(C) Pro-solution Turkish Cypriots breathed a collective sigh of relief at the February 17 defeat of RoC President Tassos Papadopoulos. "President" Mehmet Ali Talat, who had told us (Ref A) there was little likelihood of progress should Papadopoulos be re-elected, stated publicly February 18 that the incumbent's defeat raised hope that the deadlock in the negotiation process could be overcome. A more exuberant "Prime Minister" Ferdi Sabit Soyer dubbed Papadopoulos's defeat a "turning point" and said the T/Cs must push for a mutually acceptable solution. On February 20, Talat announced he was ready to meet whomever prevailed in the RoC election.

Kasoulides: Pro-Annan and More Rational

3.(C) A significant number of our T/C contacts seem to favor a Kasoulides presidency thanks to his earlier support of the Annan Plan and modern, pro-European image. Asim Akansoy, Talat's private secretary, told us that Kasoulides looked more positive, although the "Presidency" had no official position. He labeled Christofias an "ideological and rigid" politician who favored a unitary Cypriot republic, not a federation. That said, AKEL and CTP still enjoyed good party-to-party relations. Kasoulides, on the other hand, was "rational, business-minded, and flexible," Akansoy claimed, clearly showing a preference. Mehmet Cakici, the leader of the pro-solution Communal Democracy Party (TDP) told us that in the past Christofias had appeared more moderate, but now the opposite was true. He added that if Kasoulides won, he would perhaps discuss the Annan Plan as a basis for future negotiation -- a huge plus for the T/Cs. Cemal Bulutoglu, the T/C Mayor of Nicosia, also supports Kasoulides because of DISY's earlier support for the Annan Plan. The pro-solution positions of former President Glafcos Clerides and DISY leader Nikos Anastasiades, and the fact the former had visited Talat in the "Palace," also won Kasoulides points. Some T/Cs, however, despite the countless Turkish flags visible in the north, took umbrage at the omnipresence of Greek flags at Kasoulides rallies, and the candidate's recent assertion that "Cyprus is Greek."

Turkey: On Board or Not?

4.(C) We have heard conflicting accounts of what role Turkey -- or more accurately, the various factions within the state and government -- will play in future talks. Akansoy told us that hard-liners in the Turkish MFA and military were upset by Papadopoulos's defeat. They had hoped that the G/C

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leader's intransigence would have led to a Kosovo-like solution for the "TRNC." Cakici, a critic of Turkey but no radical, said that Turkey did not want a solution on Cyprus before it itself was assured of EU membership. Omer Kalyoncu, CTP's General Secretary, told us that Turkey was still adhering its "one step ahead policy" on Cyprus, and stuck by its January promise to Talat to support negotiations along established UN parameters.

5.(C) Akansoy hinted at a linkage of Turkey's EU accession process with the Cyprus Problem, but quickly added that he was merely "thinking out loud". If some EU Acquis chapters were opened simultaneously with Turkey's opening of its ports to RoC shipping, there would be a thaw that would facilitate a comprehensive solution. A more circumspect Kalyoncu told us that positive movement in negotiations perhaps might open "a" port, but warned that the "one-step ahead" policy would not continue if the Greek side did not soften its "excessive" demands. Our Turkish "Embassy" contact rejected any linkage between Turkey's EU journey and CyProb negotiations and reiterated GoT support for a bi-zonal, bi-communal solution under established UN parameters.

We Want Annan

6.(C) Regardless of who emerges victorious on February 24, the vast majority of our pro-solution T/C contacts want the 2004 Annan Plan as the main point of reference for future negotiations. While they realize it may have to be repackaged, renamed, and fine-tuned, they fear any attempt to move beyond its basic parameters. Professor Ahmet Sozen, a bi-communalist of long standing, told us he would oppose publicly any plan that radically strayed from Annan. Kalyoncu said that a new solution would also have to be put to the vote on the T/C side of the island; to get to YES, the T/C electorate, as well as Ankara, must be "at ease." Cakici chuckled "it could be called the (Ban Ki) Moon Plan, for all I care," as long as it remained true to Annan's basic principles.

7.(C) Regarding the July 8 Agreement, Akansoy said that it still could be used as a time-limited preparatory process leading to substantive negotiations -- basically, the same message Talat gave the Ambassador February 6 (Ref A). The T/C side stuck by its signature, and if the July 8 process showed some progress, they would continue to support it. He warned, thought, that if July 8 talks continued along "Papadopoulos lines" -- i.e., a strict adherence to the working group/technical committee framework, delaying movement toward substantive negotiations -- they would push hard for modifications. Soyer, however, seemed to contradict this position when he called on February 20 for negotiations "to start right away."

Help Us!

8.(C) Akansoy also made a plea to support the embattled T/C leader and, indirectly, the CTP. They faced a failing economy, rising sentiments for a two-state solution, and forces in Turkey that did not want a solution. U.S. support, even if symbolic, was a must. He cautioned that Talat's earlier anti-Papadopoulos statements should not be confused with antipathy towards a bi-zonal, bi-communal solution, a mistake the EU had made.

No Optimism Amongst Opposition, Not Even Guarded

9.(C) Opposition UBP, which rejected the Annan Plan and does not participate in bi-communal activities as a party, was largely dismissive of Papadopoulos's defeat. General Secretary Nazim Cavusoglu questioned publicly whether the G/C

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mentality had changed, or just its spokesman. According to contacts here, Turkish Prime Minister Erdogan allegedly told UBP leader Tahsin Ertugruloglu February 16 "not to make a lot of noise" on CyProb talks. UBP therefore looks unable to cause Talat much trouble in the first stage of any renewed negotiations.

10.(C) Comment: Regardless of who prevails February 24, Turkish Cypriots will judge the new RoC President by his ability to engage them on what matters most, negotiations based on the general lines of the Annan Plan; both G/C presidential candidates, however, have made it clear they will not accept the Annan Plan per se being put back on the

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table. We should leave it to the UN and the parties to find a mutually-agreed basis for substantive re-engagement, a basis with no direct allusions to the UN's last, failed effort.

11.(C) Turkish Cypriots also will judge the new RoC President by his willingness to treat them with respect, which Papadopoulos rarely did. Akansoy claimed that, if the new President actually went to Kyrenia for coffee with Talat (as Kasoulides has promised) or made a similar, conciliatory gesture to T/Cs early in his tenure, the opening of the Ledra Street crossing soon would follow. Two factors complicate Talat's hand in engaging his G/C interlocutor productively, however. First, it is unclear from here if all of Ankara is on-board with renewed talks toward a federal solution, official GoT pronouncements notwithstanding. Optimistically, many in CTP believe Erdogan can deliver backing even as he faces challenges (like headscarves) at home, and allowing Ledra to open would be early proof. Second, the economic situation in the north is increasingly perilous. An implosion this year or next would imperil CTP's electoral chances, and could bring to power either an intransigent UBP "government" or a fractious UBP-CTP "grand coalition." End Comment.

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